
MODELS FOR PRACTICE

FOCUS AREA: EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

Program Name: Fit & Fun: A School to Community Physical Fitness and Nutrition Program

Location: Gowanda, New York

Problem Addressed: Educational and Community-Based Programs

Healthy People 2010 Objective: 7, 19

Web Address: www.communityalliance.org

SNAPSHOT

Fit & Fun is a school to community physical fitness and nutrition program designed to address the obesity problems among children in four rural New York counties. The program is a collaboration of several partners. It was developed by the Healthy Community Alliance, a New York State Rural Health Network, organized as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, in partnership with the Gowanda Central School District along with five additional organizations.

The two major contributing factors to the growing obesity epidemic are addressed—poor nutrition and physical inactivity.

While a variety of health and human service programs exist in these communities, services for youth and families are fragmented and often limited by distance and lack of transportation. Additional access barriers exist in the community as a result of poorly maintained rural roads, a shortage of health professionals, and differing county jurisdictions.

THE MODEL

Blueprint: The Healthy Community Alliance serves rural communities in four western New York counties: Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, Erie, and Wyoming. Approximately 113,000 rural residents are served in this area. The population includes 11 of the 13 Erie zip codes known to have 200 persons or less per square mile. The Seneca Nation of Indians and an Old Order Amish community are within the service area. Approximately 50 percent of the service area population is 18 years old or younger.

The program began in 1999 and serves children who are in grades pre-kindergarten through 8th grade, their families, and the community. The two major contributing factors to the growing obesity epidemic are addressed—poor nutrition and physical inactivity. Educational presentations, informational displays, and group activities about nutrition and physical activity are provided for participants. In 2003, the Fit & Fun program obtained a copyright through the U.S. Copyright Office.

There are five major components to the Fit & Fun program including Healthy Snack Taste Testing, Healthy Choices Sticker Program, Fitness

Bucks, Fit & Fun Relay Night, and Family Fit & Fun Night. All activities take place in the school setting except for the Fitness Bucks activity where students record their amount of physical activity in and outside the school setting. A Fit & Fun manual was developed to assist schools beyond the Alliance service area to implement the program.

The Healthy Community Alliance has paid and donated staff members. Paid staff include the program coordinator at 0.85 FTE (full time equivalent), the public relations coordinator at 0.1 FTE, and a staff member in charge of finance at 0.1 FTE. The Alliance also has a program assistant and clerical support at 0.4 FTE. Approximately three to four staff members are donated school personnel who assist with facilitating several of the activities. Staff coordinate and carry out all project activities, public relations and outreach, survey and analysis, and financial record keeping. School administrators, nurses, food service, and physical activity staff assist in development and continue to be involved through the board and on-site activities.

The New York State Department of Health, the Governor's Initiative for Children with Diabetes awarded the Gowanda School District a \$250,000 five-year grant for the Fit & Fun initiative. Gowanda Central School subcontracts with the Alliance to coordinate all program activities. The popularity and success of the program drew interest and funding of over \$75,000 from other agencies and programs looking for ways to address obesity and other problems related to nutrition and physical activity.

While there is no direct line item in the Healthy Community Alliance budget, Fit & Fun is promoted through the agency, and funding is pursued on an ongoing basis. It is brought to the attention of potential funders/supporters through press releases, community events, brochures, newsletter articles, and word of mouth. It is publicized to prospective clients through community events, news articles, school newsletters, and meetings with school administrators and staff, as well as through a website.

Making a Difference: Each activity of Fit & Fun has its own evaluation component and includes educational material shared with participants and parents. For example, the Healthy Snack Taste Testing activity includes a survey of participants about the likes and dislikes of the food they are offered. Students are also asked if they have tried a new food to determine whether they have introduced another food to their diet.

Evaluation of the Healthy Choices Sticker Program tracks the number of days in the three-week program the students choose and eat fruits or vegetables. Through the food service director, the consumption of fruits and vegetables for several weeks before, during, and after the program is measured to determine the effect the program has on student food choices.

The Fitness Bucks evaluation measures the amount and frequency of student daily physical activity during the three week program. The Relay Team

Night program evaluation records the number of students and adults who participate and receive physical activity information. The Fit & Fun Family Night program evaluation provides information on the number of people who participate in activities, receive educational materials, and add to their knowledge about basic nutrition and physical activity recommendations.

Eighty-four to 91 percent of 8th and 11th grade students were at risk for nutrition-related chronic disease. Weight management risk was observed among 20–39 percent of students.

Beginnings: Significant health risk behaviors among youth were observed through the 1998–1999 Personal Wellness Profile surveys administered in three school districts in Gowanda, Arcade, and Springville. Most noteworthy was the lack of nutrition awareness where some 84–91 percent of 8th and 11th grade students were at risk for nutrition-related chronic disease. Weight management risk was observed among 20–39 percent of students.

Compounding nutrition risk is the demographic profile of Gowanda Central that consists of a student population that is 50 percent Native American—a group with increased risk for type II diabetes.

Chronic disease is also common. For example, results revealed that 38 percent of students in grades K–6th of the Gowanda School District had asthma. Additional indicators of need include poverty rates ranging from 8–13.5 percent compared to the rural county average of 10.5 percent. The Gowanda area has an unemployment rate of 7.3 percent compared to the lower national average of 6.5 percent. Furthermore, the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation has documented its unemployment rate at 16.8 percent. (Source: NYS Department of Health, County Health Indicator Profiles 1995-1999 – Erie County)

The original stakeholders were partners in a five year grant to implement Fit & Fun at Gowanda Central School. They included the American Diabetes Association, Cattaraugus Indian Reservation Health Center, Gowanda Central School, Healthy Community Alliance, Lake Shore Hospital, Silver Creek Central School, and Western New York (WNY) Endocrinology Center. Over time, partnerships have changed and evolved with some stakeholders opting out and new ones joining.

Challenges and Solutions: The most difficult challenge has been developing effective evaluation tools to measure the program's success since long-term effects may take years to determine. The Alliance is planning to work with an area college to review and strengthen the evaluation component. Securing funding to expand the program has also been a challenge. Additional grant funding from private and government sources is being pursued. The program will be expanding to include three additional schools in the 2004–2005 school year. Grant funds from the NYS Healthy Heart program through Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Health and

Nutrition Grant from the Office of the Attorney General are supporting these additional Fit & Fun programs.

PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION

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